"We are Heritage Speakers and we are all Diverse": Language Mediating Teachers' Identities in a Multilingual Infant Classroom

Cristian R. Aquino-Sterling

Sarah Garrity

Ashley Day

San Diego State University

Abstract

The authors describe and interpret the shifting language identities of teachers-caregivers[1] in an infant-toddler classroom who identified themselves as Heritage Speakers of Spanish. Using a qualitative research design, the authors document and make meaning of the processes and interactions that took place during the first year of program implementation. Data collected and analyzed stem from semi-structured qualitative interviews and highlight postructural themes of subjectivity and language. Drawing heavily from the work of Weedon, the authors develop a conceptual model to highlight (1) the multiple nature of the subject; (2) subjectivity as a site of struggle, and (3) subjectivity as changing over time. The constructs of personal agency, assigned vs. claimed identities, and the impact of shifting contexts are used to position the multilingual classroom as a 'third space' that allowed participants to expand their understandings of themselves, the infants they worked with, and the sociocultural environment within which they conducted their work, thus creating, re-creating, and performing/enacting multiple language identities. Findings are relevant to the work of early childhood teacher education as caregivers' enactment of linguistic identities influences the classroom contexts and the infants/toddlers being served.

Keywords: Language; teacher-caregiver identities; infant/toddler multilingual classrooms; postructuralism.

Introduction

Poststructuralist theorists view identity as dynamic, multiple, ambiguous, fragmented, full of contradictions, and as a site of struggle (Hall, 1992a; Weedon, 1996; Norton, 2000; Sarup, 1993; 1996). Rather than being static, identity construction is conceptualized as an ever-changing process that is deeply embedded in geographical, historical, and political contexts and sociocultural practices. Language is seen as the tool that gives voice to identity, as it provides the mechanism through which individuals negotiate and perform a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time (Heller, 2008). As such, language cannot be conceived of as a neutral medium of communication, but must be understood within the context of its social meaning (Weedon, 1996). Power is central to poststructuralist theories of language, as theorists such as Bakhtin (1981, 1963/1984) and Bourdieu (1984, 1977) acknowledged the struggles over meaning and legitimacy inherent in language use. Bourdieu (1997) posited that the value afforded to discourse depends on the context in which it occurs and is "a symbolic asset which can receive different values depending on the market on which it is offered" (p. 651).

In contrast to essentialist notions of identity, poststructuralists view individual agency as a component of identity formation, as individuals make meaning of events and act intentionally based on the meaning and value ascribed to these events. Because these events take place in a variety of contexts that are themselves interacting in complex and multifaceted ways, meanings are never static, are in a constant state of flux, and represent a site of struggle. In this sense, identity is both transformative and transformational as individuals must negotiate conflicts between how they view themselves and how others perceive them (Varghese, Morgan, Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

In this study we use a poststructuralist lens to describe and interpret the way language mediates the construction of shifting language identities in three infant/toddler caregivers working in a multilingual infant classroom and who identified themselves as Heritage Speakers of Spanish, or "individuals raised in homes where a language

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[1] We employ the terms "teacher(s)" and "caregiver(s)" interchangeably throughout the manuscript.

other than English is spoken and who are to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language (Valdés, 2000).

Using a qualitative research design, we document and make meaning of the processes and interactions that took place during the first year of program implementation. Data collected and analyzed stem from semi-structured qualitative interviews and highlight postructural themes of subjectivity and language. Based on the work of Weedon (1996), we develop a conceptual model to highlight (1) the multiple nature of the subject; (2) subjectivity as a site of struggle, and (3) subjectivity as changing over time. The constructs of personal agency, assigned vs. claimed identities, and the impact of shifting contexts are used to position the multilingual classroom as a "third space" (Bhabha, 1994) that allowed participants to expand their understandings of themselves, the infants they worked with, and the sociocultural environment within which they conducted their work as they created, re-created, and performed/enacted multiple language identities. The concept of "third space" signals how being "in-between" (languages, in this case) position individuals as 'hybrid' or 'mixed' entities (Bhabha, 1994).

We reject the traditional views of identity formation, where class, race, gender, and language operate to produce a coherent, unified, and fixed subject (Sarup, 1993) and where linguistic communities are viewed as relatively homogenous and consensual. Rather, we view these communities as multifaceted and dynamic, and use our data, as well as Weedon's concept of subjectivity (1996), to foreground the role of language in the construction or formation of identity.

Theoretical Framework

Language is central to Weedon's definition of identity and the relationship between the individual and the social, as language defines institutional practices and serves to construct our sense of selves and subjectivity. Weedon defines subjectivity as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (1996, p.32). Three key ideas underscore Weedon's theory of subjectivity: (1) the multiple nature of the subject; (2) subjectivity as a site of struggle, and (3) subjectivity as changing over time. In the diagram below (Figure 1), we have capture Weedon's conceptual framework in relation to our three research participants. The three pillars represent our participants, Lydia, Berónica, and Paloma across Weedon's (1997) three components of subjectivity (only Berónica allow us to use her real name, the rest are pseudonyms). Within the larger framework of subjectivity, we use the concepts of personal agency (Bandura, 2001) and assigned vs. claimed identities (Buzzelli & Johnson, 2002) to examine how language shapes the development of identity in complex and multifaceted ways. These concepts are represented in the bidirectional arrow running across participants, as they overlap and cut across both participants and layers of subjectivity, reflecting the deconstruction of binary oppositions inherent in postructural thought.

Language, as well as the power that language affords, represents the vehicle through which these concepts became visible; the tool participants used to make meaning of experiences brought to the forefront through the design and implementation of the multilingual infant classroom. The classroom represents a 'third space' that allowed participants to move beyond 'binary oppositions,' or the dual conception of life where 'hybridity' or 'in-betweeness' is not possible (Bhabha, 1994).

It is important to note that our model is nested within a variety of dynamic contexts that are constantly in flux, and as the presentation of data will illustrate.

Figure 1: Language as a Mediator of Shifting Identities
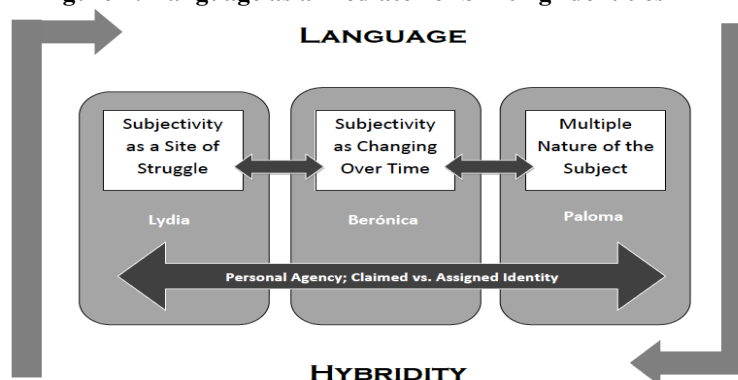
Because identity is context dependent, poststructuralist theory posits that while identity is about whom one is, it is also about whom one is not. At the individual level, identity is about belonging and the assessment of what one has in common with others and how one differs from others (Weeks, 1990). At the intrapersonal and institutional or macro level, the distinction has been made between assigned identity, or the identity ascribed to an individual by others, and claimed identity, defined as the identity or identities an individual claims for oneself (Buzzelli & Johnson, 2002), as there are often distinct differences between how individuals perceive themselves and how others define them (Weedon, 1996). Buber (1927) made this distinction by noting that we frequently view both objects and people by their functions, what Buber referred to as the *I-it* relationship, as a means to protect our vulnerabilities and get others to respond in a preconceived way. In this way, and according to Buber, we are unable to move past the surface in knowing the other at the deeper *I-thou* level in which individuals come to relationships without preconditions and are thus able to engage in true and meaningful dialogue.

Because identities are socially, culturally, and institutionally constructed and/or assigned, individuals must negotiate and at times resist the diverse positions they encounter in various contexts. Subjectivity is thus produced in a multitude of social sites, all of which are structured by relations of power (Weedon, 1996). Both the identity that one assumes, or is assigned, and the power afforded to this identity oftentimes shifts as individuals engage in a variety of social roles (Goffman, 1981). Identity thus represents a site of struggle between competing discourses in which the subject plays an active role, pointing to the power of personal agency in the construction of identity. Bandura (2001) referred to personal agency as the "essence of humanness" and defined agency as the capacity to exercise control over the quality and nature of one's life. In this sense, and reflecting Bandura's social-cognitive approach, individuals have control over the motivational, cognitive, affective, and social determinants of intellectual functioning (Bandura, 1993), allowing them to make decisions and take action that influence their life course. Weedon (1996) foregrounds the role of power in personal agency, noting that individuals may have differential investments in a variety of subject positions, all of which must be understood within the context of shifting power relations. As such, identity is always in process, and poststructuralist theory impels us to view identity as an incomplete act, one that is inconstant flux and negotiation. Hall (1990) encouraged us to view identity not as an accomplished fact but rather as a 'production' that is never complete. Similarly, Haraway (1991b) proposed that the knowing self is never finished, and in this view, identity is always a process. As we move through different geographical locations and social, cultural, linguistic, and political positionings, we deconstruct and reconstruct our subjectivities—experiencing what Anzaldúa defined as "La lucha de fronteras / A Struggle of Borders" (1987, p. 78), where "the ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity," and where "internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness" as "[…] being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a *patois*, and in a state of perpetual transition, [the hybrid subject] faces a dilemma of the mixed breed […]" (*Ibid*, p. 78). Hybrid and shifting identities are thus the result of moving across and between geographical, social, cultural, linguistic, and political positionings—creating inner borderlands of self that are constituted by and are constitutive of our social and cultural worlds.

As we reviewed and analyzed transcripts of interviews collected during the first year of implementation of the multilingual infant classroom, we were able to document and make meaning of the processes and interactions that took place. The use of poststructural lenses allowed us to draw conclusions as to the multiple ways in which participation in the multilingual classroom led to shifts in how the infant/toddler caregivers viewed themselves as hybrid changing linguistic subjects.

Research Questions, Contexts, Design

In the fall of 2012, a multilingual program (Spanish – English –Baby Sign Language) was implemented in one of the infant classrooms of a Children's Center on a university campus, located in an urban area 20 minutes from the U.S./Mexico border. The impetus for the implementation of a multilingual program came from Lydia, a lead teacher at the Children's Center who was preparing to begin working with a group of infants 6 – 11 months of age. As researchers interested in multilingual language development, as well as the theory, practice and policy contexts of multilingual and early childhood education, we decided to document the first year of implementation of this program via a descriptive and exploratory study.

Since the infant/toddler caregivers all had an interest in multilingual language practices, we decided to formulate guiding research questions aimed at understanding how language mediated their sense of identity within the multilingual infant classroom context. The questions were as follows:

1. What role does language (Spanish, English, and/or Baby Sign Language) play in mediating caregiver identities in a multilingual infant-toddler classroom?
2. How do these identities change/shift as caregivers perform their work and interact in different languages with the infants-toddlers?
3. How do the caregivers understand and/or make sense of these processes?

The current study presents data from interviews conducted with three teachers from this classroom during the spring 2013 semester. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight into the teachers' experiences working in this program and the meanings they ascribed to their varied experiences and practices. Because each participant's story was unique and reflected her own experiences and perceptions, we viewed each teacher as an individual case study, allowing us to present a detailed description of individual participants while at the same time using case study contrasts (Yin, 1984) to analyze data for patterns of both variation and consistency.

The Children's Center in which the classroom was located serves children ages six months to five years of age, whose parents are either students or faculty/staff of the university or members of the surrounding community. The Center uses an emergent, project-based curriculum and practices a model of "continuity of care" in which students remain with their teacher from the time they enter the program until they leave for Kindergarten. The young infant classroom serves approximately nine infants each day is staffed by at least three teachers in addition to lab students who are assigned to the classroom as part of their coursework.

The initial plan for the implementation of the multilingual program (English, Spanish, and Baby Sign Language) was that Lydia would speak to the children only in Spanish, while the other teachers would speak in either English or Spanish and all teachers would also employ sign language when needed, depending on their language background. We were conscious this arrangement reflected a fragmented view of bilingualism, rather than dynamic views were languages are fluid and not necessarily compartmentalized (García, 2009). Because of a complicated staffing pattern that reflected the student worker population, this plan was reconfigured each semester. It is important to note that of the nine infants in the classroom, only one was Latino/Hispanic. The goal of the program was not to maintain the children's home language, but rather to expose children to a multilingual environment in which all languages were valued and validated. The original intent of the program was that there would be assigned "Spanish speaking" and "English speaking" teachers and that the children would be exposed to English and Spanish equally throughout the day. However, as the presentation of our data will indicate, this was not the case, reflecting our contention that linguistic communities are not necessarily homogeneous and static, but rather fluid and multidimensional (García, 2009; 2014; García with Makar, Starcevic, & Terry, 2011; García & Wei, 2014; García, Flores, & Woodley, 2012; Zentella, 2014).

Participants

In addition to Lydia, two additional teachers participated in interviews and were purposively selected to participate based on their role in the classroom. Berónica and Paloma were associate teachers working in the classroom and supported Lydia in her role as the lead teacher. All three were born and raised in the area in which the university is located, and a brief description of each teacher and her linguistic and cultural background is provided below. Reflecting our poststructural conviction in the primacy of language in the construction of identity, we have used participants' own words to more fully describe their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Lydia. Lydia had worked as a lab student and associate teacher while a student in the university's Department of Child and Family Development (CFD) and got hired as a lead teacher upon her graduation. During the time that the interviews took place, she was enrolled in a Spanish M.S. program. Lydia's parents moved to the United States from Puerto Rico before she was born and her first language was Spanish. In describing her language background, Lydia indicated that:

> "They [my parents] spoke Spanish to me until I was 5 years old. Or, I mean, I guess they still continued to speak Spanish. But at 5 years old is when I started elementary school or Kindergarten…. I realized that I didn't want to sound different, so I made an effort not to sound different and to really learn English. And then I stopped speaking Spanish at home and my parents would speak Spanish to me and I would respond in English."

Berónica. Berónica was a senior in the CFD Department when the study began. Berónica described herself as Mexican-American, and when asked to describe her language background, she stated that her first language is English, although she did hear Spanish from her parents while growing up. She stated that:

> "[…] Spanish was never spoken to me in a way that it would become a second language. I heard little words like 'to sit down' or 'close the door' – just small vocabulary words but it was never something that forced me to hold a conversation with someone in that language."

Berónica stated that she wished her parents had spoken to her in Spanish and said that there were times when she felt like she should know Spanish. As the presentation of data will indicate, Berónica struggled to make sense of how she viewed herself as compared to how she was viewed by others and the contradictions that she encountered as the result of her Mexican heritage and 'hybrid' or 'mixed' identity.

Paloma. Paloma worked as an associate teacher in the infant classroom while completing her senior year in the CFD Departmement. Paloma also described herself as Mexican-American and grew up approximately 15 miles from the U.S./Mexico border in a city known for its large Latino population. When asked to describe her linguistic background, Paloma stated:

> "My grandparents came and they had this whole idea of being the perfect American. So they thought it would benefit my mom and my aunt more if they spoke English to them. So then since my mom grew up with English, even though she understood Spanish, she still spoke English to me and my sister. The reason why I learned Spanish is because my grandma has always been my neighbor. She has always taken care of me, she was my caregiver. But I learned Spanish just by being around her so much. I didn't start speaking it until maybe 3rd or 4th grade."

A review of data from Paloma's transcripts revealed that speaking Spanish to the infants in her care provided her with the opportunity to use a language that she loved, but that at times felt disconnected from as a child.

Data Collection and Analysis

Seidman (2006) noted that at the heart of interviewing is interest in understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of these experiences. As such, the collection of interview data was in line with the overall aim of our study. Each participant was interviewed during the spring semester. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. These were audio recorded and followed a semi-structured format in which participants were asked to:

1. Describe their language background(s);
2. Share their experiences working in the multilingual classroom in general;
3. Describe their experiences using Spanish and/or any other language in the infant/toddler classroom.

Data analysis began with the transcription of audiotaped interviews. The authors independently analyzed the interview transcripts by re-reading, reducing, coding, and sorting into themes and categories (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Merriam, 1998). Detailed qualitative content analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), including the use of case study contrasts (Yin, 1984), allowed us to analyze data for patterns or both variation and consistency across participants and identify key themes related to language and identity.

Findings and Discussion

In order to preserve the integrity of their experiences, findings will be presented in order of participants. Our conceptual framework will be used to make sense of these findings, allowing us to draw conclusions across study participants.

Lydia: Subjectivity as a Site of Struggle

When asked about her language background, Lydia described how she initially rejected English as a kindergartener:

> "I went to Kindergarten in the United States, I started in Florida. And I remember vivid memories of not knowing what people were talking about, of teachers trying to tell me 'Oh there's the sun!' 'There's the grass!' One of the first things I remember, and I think it was the first day of kindergarten, that I had a band aid on my leg and she pointed at it and she said "It's a boo boo!" and I remember thinking, number

one it's an English word and I wanted nothing to do with it. Number two, I knew it was a baby word and I wanted nothing to do with it. So I kept saying: 'No, es un golpe…' 'Es un golpe…'"

Lydia clearly did not want to accept the identity she felt was being assigned to her by her teacher, reflecting a site of struggle that was concretized via the power the teacher had in the classroom and the way language was used to highlight this power. However, Lydia soon came to favor of English over Spanish and recalled:

> "Another memory I have was I was in first grade and someone was sitting down, or someone was telling to me go on a chair and I said 'the shair?' And they kept kind of making fun of me because I could make the 'ch' [as in "chair"] sound. At that point in my life I guess I realized that I didn't want to sound different, so I made an effort not to sound different and to really learn English. And then I stopped speaking Spanish at home. My parents would speak Spanish to me and I would respond in English. I stopped speaking Spanish for a very long time."

By deciding to stop speaking Spanish, Lydia took an active role in the construction of her identity and how she viewed herself. From a post-colonial lens, not wanting to sound different was the result of the power of dominant societal structures, structuring Lydia's approach at constructing a linguistic identity that allowed her to feel a sense of belonging to the dominant context. As Fanon (1967) posits, "[e]very colonized people—[…] very people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—find itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; […] the colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards" (p. 18).

As our data will indicate, Lydia's decision to implement a multilingual program in her classroom was due in large part to her own experience with language loss, struggles with identity, beliefs about the benefits of a pluralistic society, and desire to reclaim one of her identities—that of a 'Heritage Spanish Speaker.'

Despite Lydia's rejection of her home language and the acceptance of an "American/US" identity, this claimed identity was often in conflict with other identities assigned to her by others. Lydia described her experience moving to California and entering a new school:

> "I got made fun of by the other classmates because I was brown, and because I was brown I had to be Mexican. I have been told 'oh go back to the border' or 'you're illegal. I would say 'no I'm not Mexican, I'm Puerto Rican. Puerto Ricans are part of the United States. We're not immigrants.'"

Lydia's use of individual agency was highlighted by the following excerpt:

> "I could feel that negativity and I didn't want to be part of that. And I think a way that I could have not been part of that was not speaking Spanish."

Lydia's identity continued to be a site of struggle for her that was highlighted by the various contexts with which she interfaced. In each of these contexts she received messages about who she should be: in her small, predominately White private school she was viewed as Mexican, yet she could not identify with the Mexican population:

> "Yeah, and I didn't have Puerto Ricans here to be able to, I guess, connect with. And I felt like I couldn't connect with the Mexican population either because when I spoke Spanish it sounded different, or they didn't feel like I was really part of them either."

While Lydia recalled making a choice when rejecting Spanish as a child, she described her decision to minor in Spanish at college as an accident:

> "It really was an accident. In the transfer orientation they talked about study abroad and I was like 'I'm going to Spain'. And I had to take Spanish 101 and 102 to go to Spain. And there had been times in Child Development that I couldn't get the class I needed, so I would just take a Spanish class. Then it ended up that I had the minor in Spanish. Well, might as well keep going, and it was kind of an accident. It did light this fire in me. I had this idea in my brain, I can speak Spanish, but then I never would. Then when I actually had to, it was hard."

Her inability to speak Spanish despite her heritage represented a site of struggle for Lydia and reflected the multiplicity of her identity. However, as she took more Spanish classes and traveled to Spain and Puerto Rico, Lydia began to reclaim an identity that she had purposefully rejected as a child:

> "And I continued and never stopped. And I'm still trying to, I feel like me going back to the university and taking Spanish in this context has been a way for me to reclaim what I lost in childhood or try to reconnect with a culture that I stepped away from. And almost like try to become what I could have been if I was raised in a place where Spanish was okay, where my accent wasn't made fun of, where my skin color wasn't made fun of, where I felt that Spanish was accepted."

During her travels to Spain, Lydia began to view Spanish as an academic language for the first time in her life, shifting her perception of who she wanted to/could be. The idea of a multilingual infant classroom at the Children's Center began while Lydia was enrolled in one of the second author's classes. As an assignment for this course, students were required to develop a parent handbook representing their ideal early care and education program:

> "I want to mention the parent handbook because I think that one of your comments back to me was 'if it's a parent handbook about a bilingual school, it should be bilingual', which was a beautiful, wonderful comment. But the truth of it was at that point I wasn't; I didn't feel bilingual enough to be able to translate it. And that's the reason why I didn't translate it because I didn't think I had the ability to."

During the course of her studies in both Child and Family Development and Spanish, Lydia became more confident in her ability to speak Spanish and began working at the university lab school. Lydia initially worked as a lab student and was later hired as an associate teacher. As a lab student, Lydia felt as if she lacked the power to speak Spanish to the children in her classroom:

> "I was the lab student at first and because I was a lab student I didn't feel like I had very much power. I didn't want to step over boundaries. I didn't know how much I could do. So I didn't have in my head that I could have probably asked 'hey can I speak Spanish to the kids, would that be okay?'"

Lydia also felt as if she lacked power to speak Spanish to the children when she was an associate teacher because of the limited amount of time that she was in the classroom (12 hours per week). When she got hired as the lead teacher, however, she felt differently, highlighting the role of social and institutional contexts:

> "Then I was like 'I have control. I can really speak Spanish to them."

Lydia spoke Spanish (and English) to the children when she was the lead teacher in the preschool classroom. When it came time for Lydia to move to the infant cottage as part of the center's model of continuity of care, she chose to work with the young infants and implement the multilingual program. In this program, Lydia communicates only in Spanish and sign language with the infants. While Lydia could have selected to work with toddlers, she exerted her personal agency by selecting to work with the young infants:

> "They were my first group ever and I wanted the baby, babies because I thought if I had the younger, younger ones I could help build their language repertoire from a very early age. They can have more Spanish input for a longer period of time."

Although Lydia speaks only Spanish to the children and is viewed by the other teachers as being the Spanish speaking lead, Lydia did not define herself as bilingual, reflecting the notion of identity as a site of struggle and the difference between claimed and assigned identities:

> "Maybe I could be bilingual but at this moment I feel English dominant and then Spanish. I'm bridging the gap with my studies but it's hard, it's not easy for me."

As interview transcripts illustrate, Lydia's identity was defined by language and the power that it was afforded in various contexts over time. While her claimed and assigned identities were often in conflict and reflected a site of struggle, Lydia continues to use her personal agency to define and redefine who she is.

Berónica: Subjectivity as Changing Over Time

Our name is intricately linked to who we are as individuals, and Berónica's identity was in large part assigned to her by her name, Berónica. Reflecting the notion of assigned identity, prior to Berónica's interview, and given her Spanish name, the second author had assumed that Berónica was one of the Spanish speaking teachers in the classroom and was surprised to discover that Berónica was one of the English speaking teachers, as reflected in the following excerpt:

> **Berónica**: "All my other siblings have really Americanized names other than their last name. But their first and middle names are very Americanized and my mom, like, my middle name is really ethnic."
> **Sarah**: "What is it"?
> **Berónica**: "Ascensión"
> **Sarah**: "Ascention"?
> **Berónica**: "But my mom spelled it, and she didn't put the "s". Instead she spelled it with a "t." It's just a weird name because it's not even in Spanish. In Spanish the name is "Ascensión," with a 'c'.

Sarah replied that she remembered Berónica's name from when Berónica was a student in one of her classes because she had never seen her first name spelled with a "B."

> "[The name 'Berónica'] it's different, too. So she gave her quietest daughter the most ethnic name. And she gave me the two hyphenated name, too. So that's just a really long name."

When asked if Lydia was surprised to learn that Berónica did not speak Spanish, and would be one of the English-speaking teachers in the classroom, Berónica replied:

> "I think that's where, when they see my name I think they're expecting a different person. But then once they meet me, I think they automatically know I don't speak Spanish."

Reflecting the concept of assigned and assumed identity, Berónica's name and her linguistic and cultural heritage conflicted with her limited ability to speak Spanish, resulting in assumed and assigned identities that were often in conflict. The following excerpt from Berónica's interview illustrates this, as she described her experiences working in another setting:

> **Berónica**: "I remember I was working at the zoo as a merchandise clerk, like a cashier at one of the gift shops. I remember talking to my coworkers and there were a lot of Spanish speaking people there, they were primarily Mexican, I think. You just knew they spoke Spanish and you're aware of their ethnicity because how they spoke English was a little different. But a lot of my coworkers didn't think that I was Mexican because I didn't have an accent and I didn't speak Spanish to other coworkers."

> **Sarah**: "Would customers speak to you in Spanish"?

> **Berónica**: "Yeah, and there were times where the customers would react to me more like 'why? You don't speak Spanish? Why not?" I felt like I was being judged. But I remember some customers, they were asking me in Spanish, and I was like 'oh I'm sorry'. And they were almost apologetic too, like "oh sorry." They were just kind of worried, like how are we going to figure out what I need? And then it kind of forced me to kind of recall what certain [Spanish] words were, so then I felt like I was glad I was able to help them. And it was just their tone that they had in their demeanor with their questions. It just varied my reactions."

In this case, Berónica's identity shifted based on situational contexts and how she perceived others were assessing her. Recalling Buber's notion of the distinction between the I-it and the I-thou, if Berónica felt as if her customers were just viewing her in terms of a function she could (or could not) provide for them, she felt less inclined to try and speak Spanish. If the customers seemed to try and move past her functionality and view her as an individual, the I-thou, however, she was more likely to speak Spanish and try to assist them. She was able to switch languages; a practice which signaled different linguistic identities.

In terms of the classroom context, Berónica shared that at the beginning of the school year she worked with two assistant teachers who were assigned to speak Spanish to the children, a context that highlighted her struggle over not being able to speak able to speak Spanish, despite the fact that she did understand it a bit:

> "So they were able to speak Spanish very fluently and they would communicate with the children in Spanish and they would communicate with each other in Spanish. But when I would need something I would say it in English or I would ask: "oh so you did change it, that's what you said?" I would just have to double check that I translated everything right. At first I felt a little bit left out because I wasn't, I felt like I should be able to speak with them in Spanish, too, and I was just kind of frustrated that I wasn't able to."

This also represented a site of struggle for Berónica, and she used the word "rude" to describe how other people (and also herself) sometimes felt when the other teachers were speaking in Spanish:

> "Sometimes I feel like in certain settings that if everyone doesn't know the language, I feel like, I've heard a lot of people say it's almost kind of rude because you really don't know what they're saying. So you really don't know if they're talking about you. Not necessarily saying you have to be accommodated for, but just so everyone knows. Communication is a big thing and if not everyone knows what's going on its kind of hard. I kind of tried to switch it in a positive way, like oh it's going to make me learn then at least."

It is interesting that Berónica said she had heard a "lot of people say" that it is rude to speak in a different language than the mainstream, as this reflects the hegemonic discourse in the United States, concretized via legislation in which bilingual education has been banned in states with large immigrant populations (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010). Here Berónica finds herself, although in a hesitant sort of way, reproducing dominant discourse ideologies related to Spanish and monolingualism in U.S. society.

From her statements, it is clear she had internalized that "talking while bilingual" (Zentella, 2014) in the context of monolingualism is "rude" and is to be restricted. This sentiment of negative linguistic profiling is closely linked to the "hispanofobia" that often pervade maistream contexts in U.S. society. We see concrete manifestations of such sentiments in restrictive language policies, for example, that seek to restrict and eradicate multilingual life in U.S. public schools. In the same way, Berónica's initial stance towards Spanish and multilingual practices reflects the failure to implementing a "culturally sustaining pedagogy" (Paris & Alim, 2014) in U.S. schools and society, a project that "seeks to perpetuate and foster linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change" (p. 85). Berónica's discourse carries the traces of restrictive language ideologies. She internalized oppressive messages regarding the primacy of monoligualism in U.S society and the "problem" of multilingualism.

In the context of the multilingual classroom, during the time that Berónica was working, Spanish was the language of power and Berónica felt marginalized by her inability to fully participate in what was going on, highlighting the power that is inherent in language and the notion that identity is to a great extent about belonging. As the semester progressed, however, and reflecting the notion of subjectivity changing over time, Berónica came to view herself as someone who *could* and *wanted to* speak Spanish:

> "I looked at it more as a learning opportunity, so I would ask them how to say certain words or I would ask them 'oh is that what you said'? I would ask them for help with pronouncing certain words because that's where I struggle a lot."

The context changed once again, however, when one of the Spanish speaking assistant teachers got moved to another classroom and was replaced by a new teacher who, as Berónica explained:

> "Didn't know Spanish like I did. I think I might know a tiny bit more than she does so I felt more comfortable because I wasn't hearing, not because I wasn't hearing Spanish so much, but because I didn't feel left out."

With this change in staffing, Spanish lost some of its power in the classroom because it was not being used as much. As the semester continued, however, Berónica continued to learn Spanish and described how she began speaking Spanish more when she took over as the lead teacher in the classroom because Lydia was ill:

> "I found myself speaking more Spanish than I have in weeks where I was not in the classroom as much because I saw that it was keeping their attention longer. So I wanted to do whatever worked to help them stay calm and engaged in the activity."

Berónica described reading a book to the children during the week that Lydia was gone:

> "It was just a picture book and it had an animal on each page and then it said in Spanish what the animal was. They really, I like that book because it had fewer words for me to say."

Berónica stated that she felt comfortable taking a risk and speaking and reading to the children in Spanish because at the time there was no one in the classroom to critique her. The social context changed once again when Paloma was in the classroom with her:

> "Paloma was actually there yesterday with me and I was reading the book and I felt myself checking with her more. I would say it and I would be, like, 'wait is that how you say it'? And she's like 'yeah that's how you say it, you said it'. But I just knew that it sounded different than how she says it because she's heard it more and she's practiced saying it more. She's heard it from a younger age than I have and I just I guess I don't like that it doesn't sound just like they say it. I found myself checking with her more when she was in the room rather than when I was just in the room with other people that were at the same level of Spanish that I was."

Through participation in the multilingual infant classroom, Berónica came to view herself as someone who could speak Spanish, reflecting the ongoing and contextual nature of identity development:

> "At the beginning I thought I would be one of the only teachers speaking English to them. I was looking at it like I wouldn't be really involved in the teaching of Spanish. But then as the semester went on I began to learn more Spanish as well, along with the kids, so it helped me see that I can speak Spanish. Although I'm not as fluent as Lydia, I can take part in helping them grown in a different language, too."

Language, and the power that it embodies, served as a vehicle through which Berónica's struggle was made visible. When asked if she would continue to learn Spanish, Berónica replied:

> "Yeah, just because I think it will prevent me from feeling, its just there are times when I feel like I should know and I feel like I can always learn. But if I am going to learn it because I want to not because I feel like other people are expecting me to know it, which I have felt before."

While Berónica came to see herself in a new way through participation in the multilingual classroom, she continues to exert her personal agency and push back against an assigned identity that is not congruent with her claimed identity.

Paloma: Multiple Nature of the Subject

The relationships between language, personal agency and assigned and claimed identities surfaced very early during Paloma's interview, as Sarah mistakenly assumed that Paloma was a native Spanish speaker:

> **Sarah**: "I want to you to start by telling me a little bit about your experiences as a student being a dual language learner yourself."
> **Paloma**: "As a student being a dual-language learner"?
> **Sarah**: "In elementary school."
> **Paloma**: "I think I kind of resent the fact that I learned English first."
> **Sarah**: "Oh, so you learned English first"?
> **Paloma**: "Yeah."

Although Paloma had been in two of Sarah's classes at the time of the interview, Sarah had incorrectly assigned Paloma to an identity that did not reflect who she really was. Similar to Lydia and Berónica, Paloma's also recalled her childhood identity as a site of struggle:

> **Sarah**: "Whereas you came into school and English was your first language."

> **Paloma**: "Wishing that Spanish was my first language, I always wanted to relate to them [English Language Learners]. I always really wanted to be, I really, really wanted to be that person in the ESL classes where I was learning English as a second language."

> **Sarah**: "That's interesting. Why do you think you felt that way"?

> **Paloma**: "I felt like culture had a lot to do with it at the time because you were proud to be who you were. A lot of my friends spoke Spanish perfectly when they were younger and I just felt like, you know, it was proud to speak the language if you were of that descent."

> **Sarah**: "So you were kind of the girl who obviously you look, you are, Mexican - you look Mexican, you have a Mexican name, but you were a little bit disconnected from your heritage because you spoke English."

Paloma: "Exactly."

Paloma recalled beginning to speak Spanish in the 3rd grade:

> "I started speaking it very slowly just because I was so like, 'Do I sound weird talking it because I didn't talk it when I was younger?' But then I got more confidence and then I started watching 'telenovelas.' I know it sounds horrible, but I did learn a lot of Spanish."

Paloma, Lydia, and Berónica all had concerns that they would sound different when speaking Spanish, reflecting the interconnectedness of identity and belonging. While watching novellas with her grandmother, Paloma asked questions about how to say things:

> "And then if I didn't understand something I would ask them. Okay what does that mean? What does that mean? I just kept developing my language and then I still now I feel like they still help me correct it when it's not the proper way to say it."

When asked if she remembered ever speaking Spanish in school, Paloma replied that she did not:

> "Oh yeah I remember it was very strict about the Spanish. I was always wondering why? Let them, I want to learn too!"

Paloma, Berónica, and Lydia were all raised in a political context in which English was the dominant language of instruction, and while Lydia embraced this, Paloma fought against it, highlighting the role of personal agency. When asked how she felt when she was told by Lydia that they would be implementing a bilingual classroom for the infants, Paloma replied:

> "When Lydia said we were going to do Spanish only, I committed myself. I said okay well that's great because I didn't get it when I was younger. So if the babies can get it from me then that's amazing."

Similar to Lydia and Berónica, the multilingual classroom provided an opportunity for Paloma to reconnect with her linguistic and cultural heritage. However, this remained a site of struggle and reflected the multiple nature of the subject, as Paloma stated that at times she needed to be very explicit with herself and make sure that she used only Spanish when speaking to the infants:

> "I feel like when I do get overwhelmed in the classroom and it's just too much, I feel like that's when I'll reach towards English. And it happens at home, like if my mom talks to me in Spanish it's because, it's not a good sign. So I don't want it to be like that. I don't want English to be the negative reinforcement either. Okay if I'm overwhelmed, I'm overwhelmed in Spanish and I just tell them that. I express my feelings to them. But then again I don't want the English to be […] it's not a negative thing. I don't want it to be, I'm feeling overwhelmed so I'm going to talk English to you […]."

While emotional and situational contexts in the classroom impacted Paloma's language use, shifting contexts and the power of language were also evident when Paloma described a schedule change that resulted in her working with two other teachers who spoke only English:

> "Now that I work Tuesdays and Thursdays the two other teachers that I work with talk only English so it's me with the Spanish. And I feel, I guess I feel left out. Because sometimes I feel well is it rude because maybe they don't understand what I'm saying. But then I feel rude to the babies if I talk to them in English."

Both Berónica and Paloma used the phrases "left out" and "rude" to describe how they felt when they were the minority speaker in the classroom, highlighting the power of language to impact one's sense of belonging. For Paloma, who had felt disconnected from her language and culture as a child, both with her parents and in school, participation in the multilingual classroom gave her the opportunity to use a language that she loved in a school setting:

> "And it's just amazing to see how far we've come with them. When I say 'siéntate, por favor' [sit down please] they'll sit and push their little chairs in and like it's just amazing."

The use of Spanish in the classroom was very affirming to Paloma's claimed identity as a Spanish speaker and as a skilled infant/toddler teacher.

Aligned with the initial research questions, the narratives provided and analyzed above led us to understand the role language played in mediating Lydia's, Berónica's, and Paloma's linguistic identities within the multilingual infant/toddler classroom. Furthermore, the analysis illustrates how these identities were experienced as sites of struggle and as changing over time as the three teachers performed their work and interacted in different languages with the infants/toddlers. Their shared narratives/stories provide evidence of how they made sense of the processes that mediated their work within the multilingual context of the infant/toddler classroom, and of themselves as hybrid, changing subjects.

Conclusions and Implications

Typically, it is assumed that the classroom environment is a space where learning and teaching occurs in a very monolithic and established manner (Forasiepi, 2011). On the contrary, and as our data illustrate, the reality of the multilingual infant classroom is that it is an environment of heterogeneous and at times conflicting practices, where community and individual discourses converge in one single space, the 'third space.' Besides the idea of 'third space' conceived as 'in-betweeness' and as 'hybridity' (Bhabha, 1994), Gutiérrez (1999) defines the 'third space' as extended opportunities of a community to reorganize its activity and create rich zones of innovation and expanded learning. Via their participation in the multilingual infant classroom (the 'third space'), our participants actively constructed their identities, which were multiple, represented a site of struggle, and were constantly in flux. Moreover, these were the agents that co-constructed this 'third space' by virtue of their participation in it. Our data also illustrates how the construct of 'third space' is closely linked to the notion of 'hybridity.' Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Alvarez (1999) proposed that classrooms are hybrid spaces where diverse funds of knowledge, languages, social and cultural practices converge and are seen as having the potential to create an 'in-between' (Bhabha, 1994) space where unique cultural experiences emerge.

Furthermore, due to classrooms being mixed spaces, they become environments where tension and conflict can arise, reflecting Weedon's (1996) site of struggle. The source of this conflict arises when teachers, learners, and learning contexts are viewed as pre-established and directed, rather than an environment where all aspects are within continuous interaction. In order to capitalize on the potential learning opportunities within diverse classrooms, such a space needs to be re-conceptualized. The classroom revealed itself as a space in tension, a third space. Rather than dismissing this tension because it did not fit into the pre-established discourse of the classroom, Lydia, Paloma, and Berónica used it to promote the creation and expansion of new understandings of themselves, the infants they work with, and the sociocultural environment within which they perform, thus creating and re-creating multiple identities. Via their ideas about the relevance of Spanish in their personal and professional lives, as well as the distinct trajectories that led them to learn and/or reclaim Spanish as a language of choice, the three participants in this study demonstrate that the category Heritage Language Speaker (HLS) is far from being homogeneous and that regardless of the 'structured structures' that aimed at 'structuring' their social, cultural, and linguistic identities in the past, they are now able to co-create democratic spaces that facilitate the performance of new ways of being and acting in the world mediated through language—safe spaces where languages are validated and linguistics identities can be freely enacted and re/claimed.

This study has multiple implications for early childhood teacher education. First, it is imperative the ECE teacher education curriculum provides future teachers with ample opportunities to understand the workings of multilingualism both at a macro-societal level and at the micro-level of the family and the infant-toddler-child care-giving context. Second, it is important early childhood teacher education programs provide a curriculum that allows future teachers to deconstruct restrictive language ideologies and policies—what del Valle denominates as "monoglossic policies for a heteroglossic culture" (2000)—and in the process examine their own language histories, identities, and ideologies. This process is of great importance given that teacher-caregiver identities influence the classroom context and the infants they serve. It is only through this processes that future ECE teachers, especially those who identify themselves as Heritage Language Speakers, can begin to validate their multilingual life experiences and forge new linguistic identities that serve to promote multilingualism as a resource and as a right (not as a problem) both inside and outside the care giving center/school. Third, future early childhood educators could benefit a great deal from experiences like the one orchestrated in the infant classroom we studied—a novel and "out-of-the-box" approach to early care. It is our hope that as we continue to understand the value of multilingualism, more Children's Centers in the U.S. will begin to integrate multilingual care giving practices, thus providing a linguistically relevant pedagogy at early stages of education and care: a cutting-edge,

counter-hegemonic, and anti-oppressive approach (Rolstad, Swadener, & Nakagawa, 2008) that honors the diversity of the human race in our increasingly interdependent global community.

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